

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND PETITION

TEXT SUMMARY

The 1st and 14th amendments guarantee the right of Americans to **assemble**, or gather, to share their opinions on public matters. The people may organize to influence public policy and to tell public officials what they think. They may do this through petitions, advertisements, letters, and demonstrations. Demonstrations, however, must be peaceful. People do not have the right to block streets or close schools. They may not endanger life, property, or public order.

The government may make rules about the time and place of assemblies and about how they are conducted. These rules must be reasonable and **content neutral**—that is, the rules may not be related to what might be said at the demonstrations.

Most demonstrations take place on public property because demonstrators want to get the public's attention. There is no constitutional right to demonstrate on private property—therefore no one has a constitutional right to hand out political material or ask people to sign petitions there. Some State constitutions, however, do grant that right.

The guarantees of freedom of assembly and petition include a **guarantee of association**.

That means that the right to be with others to promote political, economic, and social causes is guaranteed.

THE BIG IDEA

The Constitution protects—but limits—the rights of Americans to gather peacefully to express their views and to petition the government.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: *The Guarantees and Limits of Freedom of Assembly and Petition*

Guarantees	Limits
The Constitution guarantees the right to assemble peacefully and to petition the government.	While assembling, people may not endanger life, property, or public order.
Government may not make rules restricting what is said at assemblies.	Government may make rules on the time, place, and manner of assemblies.
The guarantees of freedom of petition and assembly include a guarantee of association.	The Constitution does not give the right to assemble on private property.

The Constitution protects peaceful assembly and petition but places limits on the conduct of such events.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to assemble peacefully?

2. **Chart Skills** What is the U.S. Constitution's stance on people assembling on private property?